

Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times Part 6

We continue our series today, Paul, Timothy and Troubled Times, and that's exactly what Paul tells Timothy. **“But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days.” 2 Timothy 3:1** NASB reads, **“But realize this that in the last days difficult times will come.”** KJV reads, **“This know also, in the last days perilous times shall come.”** RSV reads, **“You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come.”** Terrible times, difficult times, perilous times, distressing times. That certainly sounds...terrible, difficult, distressing. Why does Paul tell Timothy he needs to “mark this”, realize this, understand this? I believe Paul wanted Timothy, and us to understand, **This is a permanent characteristic of the age.**

Paul isn't speaking prophetically, warning us Christians in 2021 that we are now entering the last days and things are really going to heat up. The truth is, we've been in the last days since Jesus came announcing the kingdom of heaven is at hand. The writer of Hebrews declares **“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son...” Hebrews 1:1-2.** We've been living in the last days since Jesus came. On the day of Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the church, Peter declared, **“This is what was spoken of by the prophet Joel: In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people.” Acts 2:16-17.** What Paul shares with Timothy and with us is not a prediction of the future, but a description of the present. I think it's fair to say what he describes is growing in intensity, it's more widespread and there are more people on the planet so the sheer volume of sin is greater, but Paul and Timothy were and all of us are living in what the bible describes as the last days. Paul places all of us on guard, on alert, these are going to be hard times, difficult times, distressing times because we are in the last days. He's telling us, “don't be surprised by the actions of non-believers, by the sinfulness of sinners.” The unsaved, the unregenerate heart will continue to sin. In these difficult, perilous times, sinners get more sinful, wickedness abounds, atrocities grow, truth is rejected, but in the last days, while everything is dark and distressing, remember God is still speaking to us by His Son and he is still pouring out his Spirit on all people and sons and daughters are still prophesying and while there are distressing signs those signs point to the coming of the Lord and redemption and still, in the midst of difficult times, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved!

We are in a perilous season. The church has experienced plenty of them through the centuries. Religious freedom and liberty is being threatened in America and other nations around the world. We are facing difficult times, it may get worse, but Jesus is still speaking, the church is still empowered and people are still being saved. Don't forget that.

Remember, Paul wants Timothy and us to keep pressing forward like good soldiers, patient farmers, disciplined athletes, diligent workers, holy vessels and obedient servants. He doesn't pull any punches, no rose-tinted glasses here. These times are going to be hard to endure, painful, perilous, so get ready. And Paul goes on to tell us why this is so. **“For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers [abusive], disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable [unforgiving], malicious gossips [slandorous], without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied it's power...” 2 Timothy 3:2-5 (NASB)**

The problem is people, people who have rejected God and his truth. John Stott summarizes this passage that it is people, “who are responsible for the menacing seasons which the church has to bear, fallen men, evil men, men whose nature is perverted, whose behavior is self-centered and godless, whose mind is hostile to God and his law and who spread evil, heresy and dead religion in the church.”

Paul lists some nineteen characteristics or expressions by which to describe the wicked who are responsible for the distressing times. He starts by pointing out that love has been misplaced or misguided for these people. It's a heart problem. They are lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure. The bible says we are to love God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and to love our neighbor as ourselves. When we get this first commandment mixed up, loving self rather than loving God, loving money, things and pleasure rather than loving others, then moral corruption and increased sin and strife and misery follows. Warren Weirsbe wrote, “In this universe there is God, and there are people and things. We should worship God, love people and use things. But if we start worshiping ourselves, we will ignore God and start loving things and using people. This is the formula for a miserable life.” Worship God, love people and use things. But those without God, those Paul is talking about here worship themselves, love things and use people. No wonder Paul says they are boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, unforgiving, malicious gossips

[slanderous], without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; because they've gotten everything out of order. It effects every part of your life, when you start without God, when you start with self and pleasure rather than others and pleasing God. It doesn't just affect all of your life, it affects society. It affects others. Others are used, abused, mistreated, slandered because they get in your way! Notice family life is disrupted and disturbed. These people are disrespectful of parents and dishonoring of authority. "Honor your father and mother" the bible says. It's one of the ten commandments and the first commandment with a promise. "Honor your father and mother as the Lord has commanded you, that your days may be prolonged and that it may go well with you..." Deuteronomy 5:16 Dishonoring your parents brings trouble and judgement on yourself.

When you are self-centered and love yourself and money over others, you're ungrateful. No one can ever do enough for you, you are never satisfied, never grateful for what you have. If money is your love and pleasure is your god, you'll never have enough. These people refuse to forgive, they are irreconcilable, Paul says. Arrogant lovers of self are unloving. Undisciplined, without self-control. Slanderers, malicious gossips, speaking evil of others because they are only concerned with self. They are haters of good, strangers to goodness. Conceited. They refuse to even come to the table to talk. Ungrateful, unloving, unforgiving, undisciplined, disobedient, disrespectful. It is a life of God-less self-centeredness. It's hard for me to believe but this life appeals to far too many people. "Just please yourself." It's a path to disaster. Life goes off the rails when God isn't at the center of your life!

Paul is describing society without God, describing people who reject God's truth and there is a consequence when this happens as individuals and as a society. You can't reject the truth of God, you can't make yourself the object of worship, love pleasure rather than God and escape the consequences, both here in this life and for eternity.

Paul says, "Don't be surprised to find these people claiming to be religious." (v5) They have no relationship with God, no fellowship, no life, because they deny God's truth, they deny the power of God. They have a form but no substance. And contrast this list to lists Paul shares elsewhere in Scripture that speak of the character of the follower of Christ, those that love God and love their neighbor as themselves. Those who have the Holy Spirit bearing fruit in their life reflect love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. It sounds like the opposite of those who love only themselves and walk in sin. Those who know

and love Jesus are to get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander and instead are to be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other just as in Christ God forgave us. Our focus is on things that are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent, praiseworthy. Quite a contrast isn't it? This is how we are to live even in troubled times!

Of these who have rejected God and his truth, Paul tells Timothy, **“Have nothing to do with them.” 2 Timothy 3:5** Is Paul suggesting we never associate with sinners? Jesus was accused of being a friend of sinners. How will sinners hear the good news if we have nothing to do with them? Paul isn't telling Timothy and us to not befriend sinners, but he is warning us about allowing ungodly influence to affect us. Elsewhere Paul writes, **“Do not be misled: ‘Bad company corrupts good character.’” 1 Corinthians 15:33** Guard your heart and mind from people and ideas and influence that will corrupt and pull you away from God and his truth.

Paul then goes into detail about those who wield their influence over the weak and easily deceived. I think it's fair to say Paul is warning Timothy not only about the sinners outside the church, in the world, but also those who he describes as deceivers, who are operating like cunning enemy operatives inside the church, working to deceive and lure people away from the truth and away from the faith.

He writes, **“They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.”** What is Paul saying? Is he denigrating women? I don't think it's an attack on women but a warning about false teachers who prey on anyone who is uninformed, those who are weak-willed, who are not guarding their heart and mind against deceivers and false doctrine and false teaching. Learning, but they never accept and acknowledge the truth, God's truth. Don't give yourself to ungodly influence!

He mentions Jannes and Jambres. **“Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth, men of depraved minds who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.” 2 Timothy 3:8-9** Scripture doesn't mention these two but Jewish tradition says they were the chief magicians in Pharaoh's court who opposed Moses (Exodus 7:11). They opposed the truth of God as stated by Moses and opposed the will of God just as the false teachers were opposing the truth of the gospel and God's will for the church. Paul says, Timothy, rest in this, the false teachers, those who are full of wickedness and trying to

deceive others in and out of the church, they won't get far. Sooner or later, God's truth will prevail.

The day will come when the wheat gets separated from the weeds sown by the enemy. Those that claim to be religious and people of faith but that deny the divinity of Christ, that deny the clear commands and teaching of the Scripture, those that love self and pleasure more than they love God. They want Christianity without the cross, faith without discipleship, the bible without all the objectionable parts. It doesn't work that way, not for the true follower of Jesus.

Paul says we can expect terrible, difficult, distressing times. Sinners will keep on sinning and keep on rejecting the truth. What do we do? Guard our hearts and minds so we aren't deceived or led astray like the weak-willed, the naïve. Stand for and upon the truth of God's word and never compromise. Do what we said last Sunday, flee evil desires and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, be kind, teach and instruct, and keep relying upon the power and presence of the Holy Spirit at work in us. Take a stand and refuse to be led astray, refuse to be led into compromise and sin. "I don't know if I'm strong enough." Well remember again Paul's opening words in chapter 2, "**You then, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.**" In him, in his grace and by his power, we can remain strong and we can stand in his truth, even in troubled and distressing times. We will stand and his truth will prevail! So help us God. Let's pray now and let's keep on praying. God help your church to stand in troubled times!

May the Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you, the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace!